

St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School Stockport

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106124
Local Authority	Stockport
Inspection number	287422
Inspection date	9 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Peter Toft HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	149
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs S Brearley
Headteacher	Miss C Cunliffe
Date of previous school inspection	2 December 2002
School address	Roman Road Heaton Norris Stockport Cheshire SK4 1RF
Telephone number	0161 4805319
Fax number	0161 4298097

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

This smaller than average Roman Catholic primary school serves a disadvantaged area near the town centre of Stockport. Over 80% of pupils are known to be of White British heritage and the vast majority speak English as their first language. One quarter of pupils take up free school meals and a third have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Attainment on entry to the school is below average. The school has close links with St Mary's Church.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with many strengths and some outstanding features. It has dealt well with the issues raised in the last inspection and continues to improve. With the high quality of leadership and management provided by the headteacher and other managers, and the vigilance and support of the governors, it has very good capacity to improve further. Given its modest budget, its prudent financial management and the very high quality of education provided, it gives very good value for money, despite the expense of maintaining an old building. Day-to-day administration is good and the school runs smoothly.

The headteacher sets clear aims and is well supported to achieve them by a strong team of staff which has a good balance of teaching and management strengths. This balance is particularly impressive given the past and pending staff reductions in the school in response to falling pupil numbers. The school has developed good procedures to evaluate all aspects of its performance, although the evaluation of the effectiveness of teaching concentrates too little on the effects it has on learning and standards. Staff work unremittingly to ensure that pupils receive excellent care, guidance and support. This supports very firmly the very good personal development of all of the pupils and the above average academic standards they attain by the time they leave school at the end of Year 6. Standards are well above average in mathematics and science and above average in English. Given that pupils start school with standards below those expected for their age, the generally above average standards which they eventually attain show that they make very good progress. This begins in the well organised early years Foundation Stage classes and continues right through to Year 6. It also helps to explain the very high level of parental satisfaction with the school and its popularity among members of the local community. The school's strong Catholic ethos provides a solid foundation for the pupils' personal development and also their excellent behaviour and motivation to learn. The curriculum is broad and balanced; the school has a rolling programme to develop the curriculum and has planned to strengthen geography and history in the immediate future. Many pupils join enthusiastically in the school's rich diet of extra-curricular activities. Teaching overall is good: in the lessons seen it varied between satisfactory and outstanding. Staff have been well supported by the school in improving their teaching methods and this is particularly clear at the moment in the school's strong drive to improve pupils' writing. Pupils respond well to the clear messages given by the school about healthy living. The school makes very good use of its extensive links with the community to enrich the curriculum and give pupils ample opportunities to participate and take responsibility.

What the school should do to improve further

- Spread the best practice in teaching throughout the school.
- Sharpen the evaluation of teaching effectiveness by focusing more on its impact on learning and standards.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

By the end of Key Stage 2 standards are above average. This is shown not just by the results from external tests but also the detailed records kept by the school on the progress made by pupils and by the quality of the work seen during lessons and around the school. Given that the pupils start school in the Foundation Stage with levels that are below those typically seen

in children of this age, this shows that they make very good progress in their time at St Mary's and achieve well compared with their starting points. Progress is especially good in mathematics and science. The school is working diligently to improve progress in English, where it is already sound in writing and better than this in other aspects of the subject, to the high levels in the other two core subjects. A dip in standards in 2006 in Year 2 was related to staff illness in the past and effective action has already been taken to reverse this fall. Pupils show good levels of creativity, skill and performance in art, design and technology, music and physical education. All groups of pupils make good progress including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with an ethnic minority heritage. Boys do as well as girls.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well-being of pupils are very good overall with some excellent features. These are, the first rate behaviour of the pupils in and out of the school and their palpable enjoyment of learning. Staff keep a careful watch on the personal and academic progress made by pupils using detailed assessments and keeping meticulous records. This information is used with considerable focus when planning lessons and activities. Cooperation between pupils is excellent and very well promoted in lessons. They relate well to each other and to adults in the school and revel in the various opportunities to exercise responsibility. They mature into confident young people, well prepared for secondary education, both academically and socially. Healthy living and eating are actively promoted in the curriculum and extra-curricular activities and pupils participate enthusiastically in the good range of sporting activities. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school is very effective in preventing bullying and racism and in ensuring that pupils feel safe in school. Attendance is satisfactory. Parents are rightly highly satisfied with personal development of their children.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching overall is good: in the lessons seen it varied from satisfactory to outstanding. Very good use is made of external expertise to improve teaching, for example in the current major drive to improve pupils' writing. All teachers have a strikingly encouraging and persuasive manner with pupils who respond with excellent motivation to learn, and behave and respect each other. Planning is very thorough, not just for the detailed teaching of English and mathematics but also for other subjects of the curriculum. This enables teachers to set work at the right levels for the different pupils in each class. Abler pupils are well stretched and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are given detailed and appropriate help to secure their good progress. Assessment is thorough and well used to plan the teaching.

The school keeps very good records of pupils' progress and this shows a steady improvement in recent years, brought about by clearer planning and more sharply focused teaching. The school's careful use of assessment and their process for setting targets is very helpful in showing pupils how well they are doing and how to do better.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum covers all statutory requirements well and is broad, balanced and interesting. It is a significant influence on the high levels of motivation among the pupils. The school has well founded intentions to develop provision further for geography and history. The wide range of accessible extra-curricular activities is popular and has a high participation rate. The curriculum is also enriched by the effective teaching of French to older pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding and give pupils a rock solid foundation from which to learn effectively and mature well. Health and safety are well secured within the disciplined and cooperative atmosphere of the school where the supervision of pupils is excellent. Procedures to ensure the safeguarding of pupils are clear and properly followed. Pupils and their academic progress are well known by the staff and there is a high degree of mutual respect between them. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive very thorough and precisely targeted support.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher sets a very clear direction for the school and is a very effective manager of improvement. Helped by an active and committed governing body and an experienced staff, she has led the school through a period of significant and sustained improvement in recent years. This has been underpinned by thoughtful planning and carefully tailored initiatives. This work and the day-to-day performance of pupils and staff are carefully evaluated. Managers have an accurate picture of how well the school is doing. The monitoring of lessons takes place but their evaluation focuses too little on learning and standards. That apart, the self-evaluation of the work of the school is of high quality and outcomes match the findings of the local authority, which provides very good support in this and other areas, all being valuable to the school. The curriculum is well managed by subject coordinators and the classroom management of teachers is good and in some cases excellent. The school has close links with parents and it goes to some lengths to understand what they think of its provision. All statutory requirements are met. Finances are well managed and the school makes its modest budget go a long way to secure very good value for money. All areas for improvement identified in the last inspection have been dealt with effectively leading to the improvement required.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Inspection of St Mary's RC Primary School, Stockport, SK4 1RF

I visited your school a few days ago to see how well you are doing. Thank you to those who talked to me and told me about what you do and how well you get on in school. I promised to let you know what I thought about what I saw.

I think that St Mary's is a good school. It has a lot of strengths and some of the things it does are excellent. Your behaviour and interest in learning are first class and most of you really do enjoy learning at school very much. You work and play together very well.

The staff give you excellent care and advice on your work. By the time pupils reach the age of 11 you are well prepared to go onto high school. The lessons are well taught and some of them are outstanding. I hope that you appreciate just how hard the staff work to give you a good education. The school is well managed and it gives you a wide range of interesting subjects to learn and activities to get involved in. The headteacher is keen to keep on improving the school. To do this, staff will need to consider:

- spreading the outstanding parts of the teaching to all lessons
- when checking on how good the teaching is, concentrating on how much it helps you to learn.

Best wishes for the future at St Mary's.